

BLACKSBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT

News Release

DATE: March 14, 2006

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SUBJECT: Internet Fraud

Blacksburg police have received a series of Internet Fraud complaints that have resulted in local college students being bilked out of thousands of dollars.

Police have received between six and ten reports in the last few weeks of Internet Fraud. According to victims, the suspect begins the scam by responding to an apartment lease advertisement on an off campus housing website via e-mail. The suspect says that they are a foreign student being sponsored by an organization, usually a church. They express great interest in the apartment and want to rent it immediately. E-mail correspondence continues and eventually the victim will receive personal checks or postal money orders in the mail. The checks or money orders are usually written for an amount much greater than the agreed upon deposit. Sometimes the checks or money orders are for amounts as high as \$2500-\$3500. The victim then receives an e-mail indicating that too much money was sent by mistake. The suspect will ask the victim to deposit the checks, and then send them a portion of the money back. Additionally, they ask the victim to do this quickly because they need the money for another reason, usually travel expenses or to provide care for a sick family member. They will offer to let the victim keep a portion of the funds as compensation for their trouble. The victim deposits the check or money order and sends the requested amount back to the suspect via personal check or wire transfer. Later, the bank calls to notify the victim that the deposited documents were forged or counterfeit and the victim must bear the loss of all monies sent back to the suspect. Blacksburg residents have lost more than \$12,000.00 during the last few weeks to this scam.

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Because the criminal activity crosses international lines the cases are nearly impossible to investigate and/or prosecute. As a result, the victim generally is forced to absorb the loss when they find out the checks they received were not valid.

Victims can file complaints with the Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.IC3.gov or their local law enforcement agency. The Internet Crime Complaint Center or IC3 is a great tool and acts as a referral mechanism where reported incidents are farmed out to the appropriate local, State or Federal Law Enforcement agency.

The current Blacksburg cases have been identified as originating in other countries. Police have no investigative jurisdiction in the matters and are left with limited options other than documenting the incident. Also, police want to educate and warn residents that they should seek competent legal advice before carrying out financial transactions via the internet. Checks or Money Orders that appear to be valid documents must first be cleared through a recognized process. According to local bank representatives that process could take up to ten days after a check is deposited. None of the money should be forwarded until the bank confirms that the deposited document has cleared and the funds are available.

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